



Testimony in Support of SB2

Dear Chairs Linehan and Anwar, Vice Chairs Welander and Bradley, Ranking Members Martin and Dauphinais, and Members of the Committee on Children,

My name is William Garcia. I am a resident of New Haven and am testifying to communicate my strong support for Connecticut's SB2: *An Act Concerning The Safety, Education And Social Equity Of Children In Response To The Pandemic*.

Evidence suggests that the social isolation and loss of in-person services caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has increased teen suicide rates across the United States. I've personally experienced depression as a result of the self-quarantining measures that have been placed on the country as a whole. The lack of social interaction makes it even more difficult to stay motivated in my studies and education. Therefore, this bill will directly address the current issues I face as a student in my remote learning environment.

Organizations have been pushing for years to secure better mental health services for students, and mental health is often under-addressed and services inaccessible for people. An example of this is the CHDI. Their efforts have not been futile, but legislation can be enacted to do more. In cases where schools have very few mental health resources because of a lack of funding, having school employees and community members who have taken mental health screening training and suicide prevention training becomes even more important. Rates of anxiety and depression in adolescents have been increasing in the past several decades, which makes this even more significant.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges students face every day. The effects of this pandemic, especially in children and adolescents will be felt for years, even after everyone has returned to in-person learning. SB2 seeks to address mental health challenges of CT's students by establishing mental health training for many school employees and licensed healthcare professionals. Funding data shows that lower-income students and students of color are disproportionately impacted by the current lack of mental health access in schools. Passing this bill would be a crucial step in addressing and improving the social-emotional and educational outcomes of all students in the state.

I strongly support SB 2 and urge you to favorably vote the bill out of the Committee on Children.

Sincerely,

William Garcia
New Haven, CT